

CONSTITUTION

AND

FORM OF GOVERNMENT

OF THE

INDEPENDENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

Let all things be done decently and in order.—1. COR. 14. 40.



YORKVILLE, S. C.

PRINTED, FOR THE SOCIETY,

BY P. CAREY.

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1824

*The revised Constitution
was published in 1836*

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INTRODUCTION.



THE Independent Presbyterian Church was originally formed by a large majority of the members of Bullocks Creek Congregation, in York District, South-Carolina; who in the year 1810, withdrew from the government of the Presbyterian church in the United States of America. They first, in a public and orderly manner, declared themselves independent, and, in connection with their Pastor, sent up their declaration in writing to the Concord Presbytery, to which they had formerly belonged. This congregation being thus disconnected, and withdrawn from the Presbyterian body, formed themselves into an independent society, and agreed to be governed by the general principles of the Presbyterian church, both as to doctrine and discipline, as far as comported with a state of independency, until they had time to form a Constitution and rules of government for themselves.

The congregation of Salem, which had been formerly connected with Bullock's creek church, under the same Pastor, also in effect declared for independence, and the same connection still continued between the two congregations as formerly, only on the independent form. Also the congregations of Shilo, Edmonds, and Olney, soon became united to the independent body. These five churches, after some time of reflection and deliberation, agreed to appoint their quora of commissioners, respectively, to meet in convention for the purpose of forming a constitution, and rules of discipline, for the regular and orderly government of the independent church.— Those delegates met in convention at Bullock's creek meeting house, in October, 1813, and with great care

and attention to the business committed to them, they formed a constitution, consisting of the radical articles of our faith, and the form of our government. This constitution was submitted to the inspection of the churches, and was by them unanimously approved, and adopted.— The manuscript was sent to the printing office in Salisbury, North-Carolina, but the printer dying before he had put the work to press, the copy was unfortunately lost.

The Pastor of the above congregations, and a licentiate in the ministry, and also some of the members of the church, removed to the western country; which dispensation of Providence, apparently inauspicious, left these churches in a destitute situation; consequently they, during this unfortunate time of desertion, became discouraged, and made no exertions to recover, or revive their constitution which they had unhappily lost. There was, however, an independent church formed in West Tennessee, composed of the members who went from the Carolinas and others who were inhabitants of that country.

Several of the members of that society, who went with their Pastor from these churches in the Carolinas, had a tolerable good recollection of the substance of the constitution which had been formed in this country by the above mentioned convention. These members, by the strength of their memory, drew up an abstract of said form of government; which abstract was submitted to the consideration of the church in Tennessee, met in convention for that special purpose on February 12, 1817; was unanimously approved and adopted, as the constitutional rules of the Independent Church; and printed in Nashville. This church also ordained the licentiate who went from this country, and licensed another young man to preach the gospel; which licentiate has since been ordained to the ministry.

In the course of six or seven years, these three preachers returned from the western country, to the churches in the Carolinas. This happy turn of providence greatly revived the independent interest. During their absence the church of Shilo, by deaths, removals and other causes became dissolved. But there is a respectable church organized in Yorkville and added to the number.

And there are also three other societies, which are not yet in a full state of organization, under the ministerial care of these three ministers.

Inasmuch as the abstract adopted by the western church had not received in form, the sanction of the church as in the Carolinas, and as it was at best but a short abridgment of our rules, the congregations of Bullock's Creek, Salem, Edmonds, Olney and Yorkville, thought it expedient to appoint a convention to revise the laws by which they have heretofore been governed, and to form a system of rules, both as to doctrine and discipline, to be publicly sanctioned and adopted, as the constitution and form of government of the Independent Presbyterian Church.

Pursuant to this plan a Convention met at Yorkville on the 15th day of October, 1823, composed of delegates from the several congregations aforesaid. The members who formed this Convention were the Rev. William C. Davis, the Rev. Robert M. Davis and the Rev. Silas J. Feemster ; also Messrs. James Feemster, Isaac Hope, James Robinson, Isaac Davis, Samuel Melton and George W. Davis.

These delegates being met at the time and place appointed, entered upon the important business assigned to them, and maturely considered every article which is contained in this constitution and form of government; and throughout their deliberations they conscientiously endeavored to pay a due respect to the general doctrines, and rules of discipline, contained in the word of God, as well as to the rational dictates of justice; and the whole business was accompanied with solemn prayer to Almighty God, for his direction and blessing.

Thus, the *Constitution and form of government of the Independent Presbyterian Church*, was formed, approved, and sanctioned by the general voice of the convention, and was also approbated, and received by our churches as the *Constitutional Rules* by which we profess to be governed.

It is ever to be remembered, that the scriptures of the *Old and New Testaments* are the only infallible *standards of truth*. Synods and counsels, and all the divisions, creeds and confessions of men, uninspired, are fallible, and subject to errors. But the word of God cannot err.

Therefore, as fallibility is inseparable from humanity in its present state, the determination of all gospel doctrines is to be referred ultimately to the word of God. Nevertheless we deem it expedient and conducive to the benefit and edification of the church in general, to collect together the essential doctrines of the gospel, and comprise them in a short and comprehensive view.

As to church government, it appears pretty evident that God only intended to lay down the leading principles by which his church was to be governed. But the particular by laws, so to speak, necessary to the proper and regular exercise of church discipline, he has left to the prudence of the churches. The great end of church discipline is to promote truth, virtue and holiness, and to counteract error and immorality; and the most prudent and effectual mode of obtaining these two great objects, is the most agreeable to the word of God. Upon the whole we think it honest and fair to point out to the world the radical doctrines which we believe, and the laws by which we are governed; and we hope that every candid man will see, by our constitution, that the doctrines we profess, are the genuine doctrines of God, according to his word, and that the laws by which we are governed are, not only consistent with the rational dictates of prudence and justice, but also agreeable to the general principles of that government, which Christ and his apostles established in the New Testament.

CONSTITUTION

AND FORM OF GOVERNMENT, &c.

CHAPTER I.

DENOMINATIONS.

I. Our Church shall be known by the name of **THE INDEPENDENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.**—*We are a Church*, because our societies, respectively, as professed christians, meet together for the purpose of worshipping God, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer, and for the purpose of waiting on the means of grace which he has appointed for the salvation of our souls; and because we are governed by the general laws which Christ has appointed in his word. Mat. 18. 20.

We are a Presbyterian Church because the senior members of every congregation constitute a presbytery, for the government of the church, to which they respectively belong. 1. Pet. 5. 5. 1. Tim. 4. 14.

We are Independent Presbyterians, because each of our individual churches governs itself, independent of one another, and acknowledges no superior, in point of government and authority, but Christ. Mat. 23. 8–10.

II. Seeing there are different sects of christians, it is both necessary and scriptural for them to be nominally distinguished. In the apostolic age, there were two grand divisions in the churches; viz: the Jewish and the Gentile churches; and they were distinguished by different names. Those composed of Jewish converts were

called "Churches of Judea." Gal. i. 22. "The circumcision." Gal. ii. 9. 12. Acts, xi. 2. And they were often called "The Church," or "The Saints," or "The brethren in, or at Jerusalem." Acts, viii. 1. and xi. 22. Com. with chap. xvi. 4. The gentile converts were called "The brethren which are of the Gentiles." Acts, xv. 23. "The gentiles who believe." Acts. xxi. 25.—In Gal. ii. 14. the two churches are distinguished by the name of Jews and Gentiles. "If thou being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" In the 12th verse the two churches are distinguished by the denomination of *Gentiles* and the *Circumcision*. Thus the churches composed of Jews, were distinguished even by the apostles themselves, from the Gentile churches.

III. While even christians differ in their religious opinions, and divide into different sects, we deem it right and scriptural, for each sect to be known by some particular name, by which they may be distinguished from each other; but we conceive that there is an impropriety in any particular church assuming a name which equally belongs to all others. Any society of christians, for instance, who are governed by the laws of God is *a church*, a christian church, and a branch of *the Catholic church*.—Therefore we think that no particular sect has a right to be denominated by such general names exclusively, but ought to be distinguished by some appellation peculiar to themselves.

But it is greatly to be lamented, that the different denominations who agree in the radical doctrines of the gospel, do not cultivate a greater degree of love and charity toward each other. Christians ought to commune together at the Lord's table, and not suffer their difference of opinion in non-essential things to divide asunder those who are brethren in the Lord. Mark, ix. 38—40. Luke. ix. 49. 50. John, xiii. 35. 1 Cor. i. 13.—Eph. iv. 2. 3. Rom. xiv. 1. 4. 10. 13. 1 Cor. x. 29—33. Heb. xiii. 1. 1 Cor. i. 1—3.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE CHURCH.

I. An individual church is composed of any number of members, with their households, associated together for the worship of God, in the name of Christ. In Mat. xix. 20, Christ himself saith, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." See also Acts, xvi. 14. 15. and 20. 7. 8. and 1 Cor. xvi. 19. and 1. 1-3.

II. A particular church consists of any number of individual churches, belonging to one denomination.—1 Cor. xvi. 19. 2 Cor. i. 1. Gal. i. 2, and 2. 7-9.

III. The Catholic, or the whole church militant on earth, includes all denominations of christians, in all parts of the world, who worship God according to the gospel. Mat. xvi. 18. 19. Eph. ii. 13-22, and 3. 21, and 5, 23. 21.

IV. The Independent Presbyterian Church, is a body of professing christians, who hold to the doctrines and are governed by the system of discipline hereafter stated; which we believe to be agreeable to the general rules and form of doctrine authorised by Christ in the New Testament. Mat. xviii. 20. Rom. xiv. 4. 5. 22. 1 Cor. i. 1-3 and 14. 32. 33. 40.



CHAPTER III.

FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES.

The Independent Presbyterian Church in general profess to adhere to the Calvinistic system of divinity; yet every individual member is at liberty to enjoy a freedom of sentiment, as to non-essential doctrines, Rom. xiv. 1-5, 19, 22, provided he adheres to the fundamental principles of the gospel. 2 Tim. i. 13. Jude, 3. Nevertheless we are far from the opinion that *truth* and *false-*

hood, even in non-essentials, are matters of indifference. Heb. xiii. 9. Col. ii. 8. Although every man, in his own mind, is free, and cannot be subjugated to the opinions of others, yet every one is under solemn obligations to his own soul, to his Bible and to his God, to believe the truth, and to reject falsehood. Eph. iv. 14.—Every truth revealed in the word of God, ought to be held sacred, and should never be given up for any consideration: (2 Cor. xiii. 8. James, iii. 14. Prov. xviii. 23.) But every man does not see alike, and the mistakes of our brethren, in non-essential doctrines, ought to be confronted with scriptural and rational arguments, but not by the anathemas of the church. Luke, ix. 49. 54. Rom. xiv. 1-5. 10. 2 Cor. i. 24. 2 Tim. ii. 24. 25. Thes. i. 9.

All the fundamental doctrines of the gospel may be comprehended under these three general heads: 1st. The being of one true God; 2d. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; 3d. Holiness in heart and life. Any sentiment that goes to deny the being and perfection of the Deity, or the doctrine of faith in Christ, or the necessity of holiness, is *Heresy*; strikes at the vitals of religion; is damnable in its nature, and is incompatible with salvation. Consequently, all such radical errors infer the censure of the church. We, therefore, think it expedient to have but these three articles in our creed, comprehending all those doctrines which are necessarily connected with them.

I. THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE AND LIVING GOD. We acknowledge three coequal persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; but there is but one God. Mat. xxviii. 19. 2 Cor. xiii. 14. 1 John vi. 7. Is. xlii. 1. We believe him to be infinite, eternal and unchangeable, possessing all possible perfections, both natural and moral. This belief is the first principle of all true religion; and there cannot be any true religion without it. Hence Moses particularly states in Deut. vi. 4. saying, "Hear, O Israel, **JEHOVAH** our *Elohim* is one **JEHOVAH**." That is, "**JEHOVAH**" the Lord, in the singular number; "Our *Elohim*, God, in the plural number, "is one **JEHOVAH**," in the singular. The apostle also says, (Heb. xi. 6.) "He who cometh to God, must believe that he is." &c. Also the Psalmist says, (Ps. xiv. 1.) "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

Therefore to deny, or even not to acknowledge the being of a God, is *Heresy*, and infers the censure of the church.

II. FAITH IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Faith is the agreement or acquiescence of the heart, by which he sinner, consenting to the terms of the gospel, gives himself to Christ, and looks to him only, for salvation. Mark xvi. 16. Acts xvi. 29-31, and 8. 37. Rom. x. 6-11. Prov. xxiii. 26. Rev. iii. 20. Luke xxiii. 42-43. Saving faith necessarily implies a belief, 1st. that we are lost and undone sinners. (Mat. iv. 12. 13. John viii. 24. Rom. iii. 19. 23, and 5. 6-21.) 2d. That Jesus Christ is the only Saviour. (Acts iv. 12. John viii. 24. Is. xlii. 11.—3d. That Christ died as a representative, in the room and stead of his people. (Rom. v. 6-8. 2 Cor. v. 21. 1 Pet. ii. 24. Is. 53. John x. 11, 15-18. Mat. xx. 28.—Rom. viii. 3, 4.) 4th. That by his death he made a full atonement for sin and procured a perfect righteousness for our justification. (Rom. iii. 19-28, and 4. 3-5, 22, 25, and 5. 17-21. Rom. viii. 1, 2. Phil. iii. 8, 9. Heb. ix. 12-15, 25-28. 1 Pet. iii. 18.) That we are not justified either in whole, or in part, by any righteousness, good works, obedience, or holiness of our own, but only through the vicarious atonement of Christ, placed to our account, according to the plan of the gospel.—Rom. iii. 20-28, and 4. 3-8. 23-25, and 5. 17-21.—Phil. iii. 4-9. Gal. ii. 16, 19-21, and 3. 10-13, 21-22.

Moreover, the doctrine of the *trinity* is necessarily connected with, and implied in the doctrine of *faith in Christ*. The whole system of the gospel is predicated on the idea of a *plurality*, as well as *unity* in the *Godhead*. (Deut. vi. 4. Ps. ii. 2, 2, 7-9, and 110. 1. John v. 17, 38, and 8. 17, 18, and 10. 15, 18-30, and 16. 7, 13-15. Com. with chap. xv. 26. 1 John v. 7.) The covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son; the Father sending the Son; and the Son coming into the world to do his Father's will; and the spirits proceeding from the Father and the Son, are circumstances in the plan of redemption which could not possibly exist, but on the supposition that there are three distinct persons in the *Godhead*. Therefore to deny the *Trinity* is to deny the radical system of salvation, and to overthrow the whole doctrine of faith in Christ. (John xii. 44-50.

Also to deny the doctrine of the *Trinity*, is, in effect,

to deny the divinity, and also the validity of the atonement of Christ; for if there be not a plurality of divine persons in the Godhead, Christ must, of necessity, be a mere creature, and if a mere creature, he would not have been competent to make a sufficient atonement for sin, and infinite justice would not have been satisfied by the death of the cross. If so then, as the apostle says:—(1 Cor. xv. 14–17.) “Our preaching is vain, and our faith is also vain, and we are yet in our sins.” But if Christ be a divine person he must of necessity be equal with the Father, and must be fully competent to the whole work of redemption. (Is. xlv. 21–25. John xix. 28–30. Heb. vii. 24, 25.) Therefore to deny or oppose the existence and equality of the divine persons in the Godhead, is *Heresy*, and shall be deemed censurable by the church. (1 John ii. 20, 22–24, and 5. 20. 2 John iii. 9, 10, 11. Mat. xxviii. 19. John i. 1–4.)*

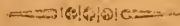
In the last place, Faith in Christ implies a belief that the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God; for no man can believe in Christ, who denies the truth of the Bible. John v. 39, and 20, 31. Rom. x. 14, 17. 2 Tim. iii. 15–17. 2 Pet. iii. 16. Therefore to deny or not to acknowledge the truth of the scriptures, is *Heresy*, and censurable by the church.

III. HOLINESS. This is a special command of God; (1 Pet. i. 16.) “Be ye holy; for I am holy. Also the Apostle to the Hebrews says, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. (Heb. xii. 14.) Holiness is one principle part of the salvation of the soul; it is the radical evidence of true and saving faith: as a consequence of an interest in Christ, and it qualifies us for the enjoyment of God in heaven. Consequently no man can be saved without holiness. It is not the condition of our salvation, but a constituent part of the salvation which

* *There is a great difference between a person's not having a satisfactory belief of the doctrine of the Trinity, and absolutely denying, or opposing it. A good man may, through the want of information, have some difficulties, and may not be clear and decided in professing his belief of this doctrine. Therefore we are carefully to distinguish between ignorance and a wilful and sentimental denial or opposition in this important article. Acts xix. 22. John ix. 35–38.*

we receive from Christ, by faith, and is wrought in us by the holy Spirit. 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. Gal. v. 22, 23.—Therefore, unholiness in the life and conversation, is contrary to the rules of the gospel, and infers the censure of the church. 1 Tim. v. 20. 1 Cor. v. 11.

Q. These doctrines we hold to be the essential doctrines of the gospel. And no church shall be considered as belonging to our body, or as held in our communion, which maintains or believes doctrines incompatible with, or contrary to these three articles of our creed, as stated in this chapter. And therefore we are not responsible for the heretical doctrines of any church which denies or opposes them, or either of them.



CHAPTER IV.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH TO LICENSE AND ORDAIN MINISTERS—ALSO, THE CALLING OF MEN TO THE MINISTRY.

The Presbytery of any individual church has full power to license and ordain ministers, (called also, bishops, or pastors,) to preach the gospel, and administer the ordinances which God has appointed in his word. Christ himself, who is the head of the church, has the sole prerogative of calling men to the ministry. Mat. ix. 38, and xxviii. 19, 20. Acts xiii. 2, and xx. 28. 1 Cor. xii. 27, 28. Eph. iv. 7, 11, 12. Even the inspired apostles had not this power; neither is this prerogative vested in the church; but it belongs to God only. John xv. 5.

It appears evident from the records of the Acts of the apostles, that the authority of recognising and approbating those whom Christ has called to the ministry, belongs to every individual church. Acts xiii. 1, 3, and xviii. 27, and xvi. 2. And God has given in his word, certain rules, which the church is to observe, in order to ascertain those who are sent by divine authority to preach the word. (1 Tim. iii. 10, 13. Office of a deacon, Greek. office of a minister.) These rules the church

ought to attend to, and guard as much as possible against introducing men into the sacred office, who have no evidence of a divine call. 1 Tim. v. 22, and iii. 10. Mat. vii. 15, 16, 20.

The church at Lystra appears to have licensed and ordained Timothy; and the apostle Paul was no doubt the Moderator of the Presbytery who presided in the business of laying on of hands. Compare Acts xvi. 1—3 with 1 Tim. iv. 14, and 2 Tim. i. 6. The eloquent Apollas was unknown to the apostles till some time after he came to Ephesus. He was a preacher, although he knew only the baptism, that is, the import of the baptism or the doctrine of John. But Aquilla, and Priscilla, took him home to their house, where there was a small christian church, which Paul had planted shortly before; there he was instructed more perfectly in the way of the Lord. From thence he went to Achaia with letters of recommendation from the members of the church at Ephesus; and his labors were greatly blessed in those churches of Greece, although he had probably never seen any of the apostles of Christ. Compare Acts xviii. 24—28 with verse 18—25, and 1 Cor. xvi. 19.

II. When any man is endued with good talents, both as to his intellectual capacities and his aptness for public speaking, and has obtained a good education, at least in the English language, and has been well instructed in the principles of the Christian religion; and also when divine grace has made him the subject of genuine piety; if his mind be inclined toward the work of the ministry from the pure motives of love to the cause of God, and the souls of men; it may be charitably presumed that God has called him to the ministry. Matt. xiii. 52. Acts xvi. 2. 1 Tim. iii. 2. Titus i. 3, 9. The only decisive test of a divine call, which the scriptures have given us, are the doctrines which a minister preaches and the fruits of his labors.

III. “He who confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” This does not mean the confession of his faith as an article of his creed, but the sum and substance of his sermons. The *main drift* of his public ministrations must centre in *this one point*; to wit, that “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” *Come in the flesh*, does not mean merely that Christ is come in human na-

ture, but that he assumed the fallen, guilty and condemned state of sinners in the flesh: that is, of sinners of Adam's race. 2 Cor. v. 14—16. In other words, it means that Christ died in the room of fallen sinners, and his death is the only atonement for our sins, and the only meritorious ground of our salvation. He whose public ministrations confesses, or teaches, this doctrine *is of God*: but he who does not teach this doctrine *is not of God*. 1 John iv. 2, 3. 1 Cor. i. 18, 23, 24, and ii. 2. Compared with Gal. i. 8, 9, and vi. 14—16, and 1 Cor. iii. 11.

IV. He is called of God to the ministry, who not only preaches *Christ crucified* as the only ground of a sinner's salvation, but is also made the means of convincing and converting sinners, or of comforting, nourishing and edifying the people of God. 1 Cor. iii. 5—9. Christ's commission to his ministers is, "To open the eyes (of sinners,) and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," &c. His command is also, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep;" and again, "feed my sheep." Acts. xxvi. 17, 18. John xxi. 15—17.

The scribe instructed by Christ unto the kingdom of heaven, is like a good householder who bringeth out of his treasure things new and old. Matt. xiii. 52. Peter was constituted a fisherman to catch men in the gospel net. Mark i. 17. Luke v. 10. Christ makes some of his ministers "Boanerges, sons of thunder," (Mark iii. 17.) and others he makes "sons of consolation." (Acts iv. 36.) Thus faithful and wise stewards, who are appointed by Christ over his household, gives every one his portion of meat in due season. Luke xii. 42.

Christ warns the church to beware of false prophets. Matt. vii. 15—20. He also has given us an infallible mark to distinguish his true prophets from those who are wolves in sheep's clothing. "By their fruits (says he) ye shall know them." Not the common fruits of religion which all Christians bring forth; for there are many good Christians who bring forth good fruit in their lives and conversation, whom God never calls to the ministry. But Christ means *their ministerial fruits*. Thorns do not yield grapes, nor thistles figs. Those ministers who, in their ministrations, do not feed and refresh the church with the pure and wholesome doctrines of the gospel, and whose labors are not blest to the conviction

of sinners, or the nourishment of God's people, are thorns and thistles. God, by his Spirit, does not acknowledge them, and therefore, not being called of God, they are barren and unfruitful, and the church receives no benefit from them, and they have no seals to their ministry.

But, on the other hand, those ministers whose labors are accompanied by the Spirit of God, do produce fruit; they yield figs for food, and clusters of grapes that cheer both God and man. (Judges ix. 13.) God is pleased with the success of his gospel and his holy ordinances on the hearts of sinners, and the people of God sit under the shadow of the fruitful vines and fig-trees which the Lord hath planted, and are regaled with their pleasant fruits. Thus by their fruits we shall know them: for "a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

Paul had begotten the believers in Corinth by the gospel, (1 Cor. iv. 15.) therefore he counted them his work in the Lord, and the seal of his apostleship. (1 Cor. ix. 1, 2.) He also counted them his certificate from heaven, not laid up in a hidden place, but known and read by all men; not written with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not on paper, nor yet on tables of stone, but on the fleshly tables of heart. 2 Cor. iii. 1—3. Happy is that minister who has such credentials, or such seals to his ministry. See Gal. ii. 7—9. and 1 John iv. 5, 6.



CHAPTER V.

THE TRIALS, AND LICENSURE OF CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY.

I. When any person, who is a male communicant, feels a sincere and hearty inclination to engage in the work of the ministry, (1 Tim. iii. 1.) and hopes that he is in some suitable degree qualified for it, it is his duty to put himself under the care and direction of the presbytery of the church to which he belongs, or to which he may choose to connect himself. The church must be careful

not to admit any person as a candidate, except he be in full communion, and a member of good moral standing. Acts xvi. 2. 1 Tim. iii. 7.

II. It would be very desirable and recommendable for those young men who have the ministry in view, to endeavour, if in their power, to obtain a liberal education, at least, to make themselves acquainted with the Greek language, in which the New Testament was originally written. The church ought ever to be careful, as much as possible, to encourage literature, and keep up a learned ministry. To have our pulpits filled with illiterate men would be a circumstance seriously to be deprecated. 1 Tim. iii. 6. Nevertheless these observations are not to be so rigorously construed, as to exclude all those from the ministerial office who have not the advantage of a liberal education. God can qualify those whom he intends to call forth to his work; and there are many men of fine talents and great abilities, who have no more than good English learning. Therefore, a knowledge of the dead languages, or academical acquirements, shall not be considered as an essential qualification of a minister of the gospel. But it is required that candidates for the ministry be good English scholars, and so well acquainted with English grammar as to be able to read, write and pronounce the English language with a good degree of propriety. 1 Tim. iii. 6.

III. Before a Presbytery shall receive a candidate under their direction, they must first be satisfied as to his church membership, and his good moral standing. They must examine him at least as to his competency in the English language, and also as to his views and motives in entering into the work of the ministry. They must also examine him as to his experience of a work of grace on his heart, his views of his interest in Christ, and of his progress in a life of religion. If the presbytery sustain the examination, and are satisfied, they shall receive the candidate under their care as a probationer for the ministry of the gospel. 1 Tim. v. 22, and iii. 10. 2 Tim. i. 5.

IV. The presbytery shall then proceed to conduct the candidate through a regular course of trials previous to his licensure. They shall appoint him texts to preach on, or passages for lectures, from time to time; which

sermons, or lectures, the candidate shall deliver before them, as parts of trial. 1 Tim. iii. 9, 10. It is recommended that candidates write their trial discourses, that the presbytery may have a better opportunity, by examining them, to judge both as to their knowledge of the English language, and as to their acquaintance with the doctrines of the gospel. The presbytery may appoint a committee of two or more of their judicious and sensible members, and commit the special direction of the candidate to them. It will be best for the presbytery to appoint frequent meetings, at least once every six months, or oftener if they find it needful or profitable, that the candidate may frequently preach before them. This will afford sufficient opportunity, not only to the presbytery of giving instruction to the candidate, and enquiring into his progress in divinity, but it will also afford frequent occasion to the candidate of receiving instruction, and of improving by habit in the necessary art of public speaking.

V. When the presbytery is satisfied with the talents and performances of the candidate, they shall appoint him a text for a popular sermon, to be delivered publicly, previous to his licensure. They shall examine him on doctrinal divinity, and if they sustain his sermon and examination, and are sufficiently satisfied as to the virtue, piety, and orthodoxy of the candidate, they shall proceed to license him in the following manner. 1 Tim. iii. 10. Thus i. 9.

The officiating moderator shall call up the candidate, and shall put to him the following questions :

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, and the only infallible rule and standard of faith and practice? 2 Tim. iii. 15—17. John v. 39.

2. Will you, through the assistance of divine grace, endeavour to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, as the only way of salvation? 1 Cor. ii. 2. Acts iv. 12. Gal. i. 8, 9.

3. Do you feel yourself under obligations, through divine grace, to walk orderly, according to the precepts of the gospel? Thus i. 7—9. 1 Tim. ii. 12, 16.

4. Do you promise to submit to the government and discipline of this presbytery, while you continue a mem-

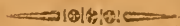
ber of it; and to the discipline of whatever presbytery you may be connected? 1 Pet. v. 5.

The candidate having answered these questions in the affirmative, the moderator shall offer up a prayer to God suitable to the occasion. After which he shall address the candidate in words to the following effect:

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the authority which he has given to his church, we license you to preach the everlasting gospel of our Lord and Saviour: and may God be with you, and furnish you for his important work, wherever he, in the course of his providence, may call you to minister in his name. Amen.” Mark xvi. 16. Matt. xxviii. 20. 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2.

The officiating moderator shall then give the licentiate an address, relative to the duties of his solemn undertaking. Afterward a hymn may be sung, and the solemnity closed with the apostolic benediction.

VI. No candidate shall be licensed till he is twenty-one years of age. 1 Tim. iii. 6.



CHAPTER VI.

OF ORDAINING A LICENTIATE.

1. One of the special objects of sending out a licentiate to preach the gospel among the churches, sometime previous to his ordination, is to give an opportunity to the churches to ascertain whether he is, or is not, a minister sent of God. And the churches ought, in such an important matter as this, to judge conscientiously, impartially and with candor, according to the rules laid down in the word of God. 1 Tim. v. 22, and iii. 10. (See chap. IV. sect. 2 and 3.)

1. If he preach Christ crucified, and faith in him as the only ground of justification; and all the graces of sanctification and benefits of salvation as flowing only through him, as our great atonement: they ought to judge favorably of him. This is a good evidence of his

being taught and called of God. (1 John iv. 2, 3. 2 Tim ii. 2. Titus i. 9. 1 Tim. i. 19.)

2. If his labors are blessed, that is, if either sinners are converted under his preaching, or if his ministrations feed the people of God; if good people love to hear him and feel themselves delighted, refreshed, quickened, comforted and strengthened by his preaching, these are infallible marks of a minister's being called and acknowledged by Christ. When the churches find all these testimonials meeting in a licentiate, or in any minister, they ought not to hesitate, but acknowledge him to be sent of God. See Matt. vii. 16. Luke xii. 42. 1 John iv. 6. John xxi. 15, 16, 17. 1 Peter v. 2. compared with John xiii. 20.

II. When a licentiate is called to take the pastoral care of a congregation, or when he has a written or well authenticated recommendation from any other church or churches, expressing their acquiescence in his ordination, it shall be considered as a sufficient testimony from the churches; and if the presbytery is also satisfied from their own knowledge of the licentiate, they may ordain him, provided the licentiate himself is willing to be ordained. Acts xvi. 2. 1 Tim. iii. 13. 2 Tim. ii. 2. Titus i. 9. If the licentiate be called to the pastoral care of an organized church, and he be willing to accept of the same, it will be expedient for the presbytery to dismiss him before he is ordained, and for him to unite himself to the church where he expects to reside as their pastor, and for them to ordain him.

III. The presbytery, to which the licentiate belongs when he is to be ordained, shall appoint him a text, or a subject for a lecture, or both if they choose, for a popular trial, previous to ordination, and they may also examine him on divinity on church history, on church discipline, and on every branch of science they may think expedient, until they are fully satisfied as to his soundness in the faith, his talents and improvement.

The ordinations must be open, in the presence of the church. (1 Tim. vi. 12. 2 Tim. ii. 2.) If an ordained minister be present, an ordination sermon ought to be preached. Then the officiating moderator shall call up the licentiate and shall propose to him the same questions which were stated before, in the case of licensure.

Chap. v. Sect. v. and shall add the following, viz:—
 “Do you solemnly promise before God that you will en-
 “deavor, through grace, to preach the word of God
 “faithfully, and administer the ordinances of the gospel
 “conscientiously; and that you will endeavor to hold
 “fast to the doctrines taught in the holy scriptures, and
 “that you will never desert the standard of the gospel,
 “whatever difficulties or persecutions may befall you?”
 2 Tim. i. 13, and ii. 3—12. 2 Cor. xii. 23—27. Mark
 viii. 38.

IV. The licentiate having answered the above ques-
 tions in the affirmative, shall sit or kneel down, and the
 officiating moderator shall lay his right hand upon his
 head, and at the same time the presbyters of the congrega-
 tion, at least as many as conveniently can, shall also
 lay on their hands, and the moderator shall offer up a
 suitable prayer to God, setting apart the licentiate to the
 holy ministry, and committing him to the guidance and
 protection of the grace of God and to his holy keeping,
 &c. 1 Tim. iv. 14. 2 Tim. i. 6.

V. After prayer the moderator shall give him the right
 hand of fellowship, and after him the members of the
 church, and also the members of any church, may give
 him their right hands, as a solemn token of their appro-
 bation. Gal. ii. 9.

The moderator shall, in the name of the presbytery,
 present him with a bible, not only as a token of respect,
 but also as the only infallible rule by which he is to preach
 the gospel of Christ. 2 Tim. iii. 14—17. 2 Pet. i. 19—21.
 Is. viii. 20. He shall then give him a solemn charge,
 relative to the duties of his sacred office. Then a hymn
 may be sung, and the solemnity closed with the apostol-
 ic benediction. 2 Tim. iv. 1—5. 1 Pet. v. 1—3.

FORM OF GOVERNMENT.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

I. It is generally admitted that the primitive churches in the apostolic age, were founded and governed on the simple principles of *Independency*. The celebrated Dr. Mosheim, in his ancient church history, vol. 1. page 107, gives us a plain and distinct account of the state of the apostolic churches, in the first century : “ The churches in “ those early times,” says he, “ were *entirely indepen-* “ *dent* ; none of them subject to any foreign jurisdiction, “ but each one governed by its own rules, and its own “ laws. For though the churches founded by the apos- “ tles,” (to wit : by the twelve at Jerusalem,) “ had this “ particular difference shewn them, that they were con- “ sulted in difficult and doubtful cases, yet they had no “ juridical authority ; no sort of supremacy over the oth- “ ers, nor the least right to enact laws for them. No- “ thing, on the contrary, is more evident, than the per- “ fect equality that reigned among the primitive church- “ es ; nor does there even appear, in this first century, “ the smallest trace of that association of provincial church- “ es, from which *councils* and *metropolitans* derive their “ origin. It was only in the second century that the “ custom of holding councils commenced in *Greece*, from “ whence it soon spread through the other provinces.— “ *Note.* The meeting of the church of Jerusalem, men- “ tioned in Acts 15th, is commonly considered as the “ *first Christian council*. But this notion arises from a “ manifest abuse of the word *council*. That meeting was

“only of *our church*. But every one knows, that a *council* is an assembly of deputies sent from *several churches* associated by certain bonds in a *general body*; and therefore the supposition above mentioned, falls to the ground.”

Also, (in page 177, vol. I.) our judicious historian has given us an account of the state of the church in the second century. “During a great part of this century,” says he, “the Christian churches were independent of each other: nor were they joined together by association, confederacy, or any other bonds but those of charity. Each Christian assembly was a little state, governed by its own laws. But in process of time, all the churches of a province were formed into a large ecclesiastical body, which, like confederate states, assembled at certain times, in order to deliberate about the common interests of the whole. This institution had its origin among the Greeks, with whom nothing was more common than this confederacy of independent states. But these ecclesiastical associations were not long confined to the Greeks.—To these assemblies, in which the deputies, or commissioners of several churches consulted together, was appropriated the name of *Synods*, by the Greeks, and that of *Councils*, by the Latins; and the laws that were enacted, in these general meetings, were called *Canons*, i. e. *Rules*.”

“These *councils*, of which we find not the smallest trace, before the middle of this century, changed the whole face of the church, and gave it a new form, for by them, the ancient privileges of the people were considerably diminished, and the power and authority of the bishops greatly augmented. Another effect of these councils was, the gradual abolition of that perfect equality which reigned among all the bishops in the primitive times.”

II. This sketch of church history, (the correctness of which is generally acknowledged,) gives us a beautiful representation of the simple grandeur of the apostolic churches, enjoying all the freedom and happiness of a perfectly independent government, calling no man or set of men, *master* upon earth, and acknowledging no *superior* but Christ. It also gives us a melancholy view of the manner in which they lost their liberty by the active

policy of the wise and learned Grecians. The greeks, as our historian observes, who were divided into a great number of petty states, were in the habit, for many hundred years, in their civil policy, of confederating together, for their mutual defence against their common enemies. When they were converted to christianity they enjoyed all the sweets of religious liberty, while they continued under the government established by the apostles. But in process of time, they introduced a confederacy of the several churches in their respective districts, in imitation of their confederated states, and directly contrary to the ever memorable prohibition of Christ, the head of the church. (Matt. xx. 25, 26. Mark x. 42, 43, and Luke xxii. 25, 26.) They modeled the government of Christ's kingdom exactly after the manner of the kingdoms of the Gentiles. This unhappy form of government, as Dr. Mosheim observes, (vol. I. page 178, and 179,) was not long confined to the Greeks; it soon spread over all the churches in Europe, Asia and Africa; and the church of Christ was as a great empire, or rather, as several kingdoms composed of several districts, governed by bishops, prelates, councils and synods; and the baleful consequence was soon felt, and is severely felt to this day, in a great part of christendom.

The old strife, *who shall be the greatest*, soon arose among the bishops; and the Metropolitan churches, like the mother of Zebedee's children, soon brought forward their *Metropolitan* bishops desiring them to sit at the right hand, and at the left of Christ in his kingdom.— And in a few hundred years, the bishop of Rome placed himself in the *chair of St. Peter*, as the head of the church, and he, with his *court of Cardinals*, has filled the whole church of Christ with blood and slaughter. This was the doleful consequence of the church's deviating from that independent form of government which Christ had originally appointed.

III. Although it is admitted that Christ has not given, in his word, a full and complete system of laws for the government of his kingdom, but has left a great deal to the prudence and wisdom of the church; 1 Cor. xiv. 40. yet he has undoubtedly given us the general plan and form of church government; and he has stated the leading features of the laws for the discipline of his church;

By which all the special rules of that discipline ought to be directed. And it is undoubtedly the duty of the church to adhere to that form, and to those general rules which Christ has established. It is surely to be supposed that the apostles would adhere strictly to the form which Christ had ordained, in the government of the churches which they planted. Therefore in order to ascertain what that form is, we must attend to what Christ himself has stated in his word; and to the account given us in the Acts of the apostles, and to the correct history of the church in those times.

IV. From the statement given us by Matthew xx. 20—23, and Mark x. 35—45, and Luke xxii. 24—27, we find that James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, with their mother, aspired to the highest offices in the kingdom of Christ; but their request was not granted. This was indeed an early specimen of that domineering spirit which has done so much injury to the church. The other ten disciples when they understood what the two brothers had attempted to obtain, were filled with indignation against them, not being able to bear the thought of any superior. Therefore an illnatured contention took place among them, as to which should be the greatest. Our blessed Lord, well knowing the natural temper of man, and clearly foreseeing the dangerous consequences of such a predominant disposition in his church, called the wrangling disciples unto him, and addressed them to the following effect: The governors and princes of the Gentile kingdoms have their particular policy in the forms of government which they respectively exercise over their subjects; you know that according to their different forms, emperors, kings, governors, senates, and councils, exercise *dominion* respectively over the people. But I forbid such a form of government to be exercised in my church. “*It shall not be so among you.*” And he commanded them all, even to the very greatest, to be servants to one another, which would bring them all to a perfect equality. He then proposed himself as a pattern to them; who, although he was in reality the supreme head of the church, yet he was the servant of all, and for the church’s sake was obedient even unto death for his people. Therefore how *ill* does it become any member of the church to assume a character superior to

the humble state of Jesus Christ his Lord and Master, when he was on earth?

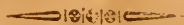
We have it stated in Matt. xxiii. 1—12, that Christ, on another occasion, observed to his disciples, that the scribes and Pharisees, who set in Moses' seat, made broad their phylacteries, and enlarged the borders of their garments; loved the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and at feasts, and to be saluted with high respect in public places, and to be called, *Rabbi, Rabbi*. But he forbid even the apostles themselves, who were the very highest order that ever Christ ordained in his church, to be called *Rabbi*; but even they, as well as all other orders, must not be called masters in point of superiority in the government of the church. The reason he gives is "*for one is your Master even Christ;*" then he adds, "*and all ye are brethren.*" He also forbid them to call any one their *father*, because one was their *Father* who is in heaven.

It must appear evident to every candid mind, that Christ, in these passages, is speaking of the government of his church, and that he does forbid his churches to submit to any superior, and that he has ordained that all the senior members who have a share in government, shall be as brethren, on a perfect equality with each other, and that no individual society shall call any man *master*, or be amenable to any man or set of men on earth: but shall be governed by their own body, on the proper principles of an independent form of government. Pastors and teachers, &c. are vested with their peculiar offices, as teachers, and bishops and as such are superior to the other members, and are to be revered, esteemed, and obeyed; but as ecclesiastical rulers they must not be masters and Lords over God's heritage, but considered as brethren; and on a perfect equality with the other presbyters.

What is stated above, appears to be the natural meaning of these passages of scripture, and when we compare these rules either with St. Luke's history of the apostolic churches, or with the account of other historians, we are still more firmly convinced that the independent government is the proper form which Christ has authorised in his word. This is a matter of great importance, and deserves serious attention.

V. Presbyters, synods and general assemblies, are all judicatories composed of delegates from different churches, contained in a district of smaller or greater bounds, and these judicatories have jurisdiction over all the churches within their respective districts. But as Dr. Mosheim says, where can we find the least trace of such a form of government among all the apostolic churches, either in the Acts of the apostles, or on the records of church history, until we go among the Greeks after the middle of the second century? As for diocesan bishops, and metropolitan prelates, neither the orders of Christ, nor the example of the churches under the direction of the apostles, nor even the history of the primitive age of the church, give us any colour of authority for them.

The church of Scotland, on the noble principles established by Calvin, in the church of Geneva, certainly deserves great honor, for retrenching the arrogant claims of bishops, and reducing the clergy to an equality with the eldership, in point of government. When we consider the church of Geneva, just emerging from the abyss of popery we must acknowledge that she made a noble stand, and went a great length in restoring the church to her primitive liberty. Yet she will never regain her original simplicity and freedom, until she humbly sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn to call no man master on earth: because one is her Master, even Christ.



CHAPTER II.

THE DIFFERENT CLASSES OF MEMBERS OF WHICH CHURCHES ARE COMPOSED.

The church is composed of several classes of members:

I. Bishops, who are also called pastors, ministers, teachers, elders, &c. (Phil. i. 1. "bishops and deacons." Greek, bishops and ministers. Eph. iv. 11. 1 Tim. iv. 6. Gal. vi. 6. 1 Tim. v. 17.) These are the highest orders in the church, not as governors, but as the ambas-

sadors of Christ, who labor in word and doctrine; and as such they are to be respected and honored for Christ sake, and highly esteemed for their works sake. 2 Cor. v. 20. 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. Heb. 13. 7, 17. 1 Tim. v. 17. Ps. cv. 15.

II. *Presbyters*, or elders. This class is composed of all the male members, in full communion, who are twenty one years old, and upwards, (except persons of colour.) To this class, including pastors, and teachers, &c. (Sect. I.) belongs the government of the church; that is to say, every individual church shall be governed by its own Presbyters, and no other person whatever shall exercise any authority, in, or over, any church, but the elders belonging thereunto. Matt. xxiii. 8—10. All the elders of an individual church shall profess equal authority in government, and no one shall be superior or inferior to another, for as Christ has determined, "*they are all brethren.*" This class constitutes the *presbytery of the church*, or congregation, which is all the kind of Presbyteries we read of in the New Testament. They are the *Presbuteroi*, (Greek,) or the *Presbyters* or *elders*, who shall have full power, and the sole power of governing the church of which they are members.

III. *Juniors* and *non-communicants*. Juniors are properly those who are in full communion, but are not twenty one years old; such are in full fellowship in the church, as brethren in the Lord; but because they are not of age, they are not to be admitted to bear rule as members of the judicatories of the church. 1 Tim. v. 1. 1 Pet. v. 5.

Non-communicants may be either juniors or seniors in age; but even those who are of full age, are not permitted to rule in the church, because they are not in full membership. Yet the church must consider them, whether older or younger, as under her care for the benefit of their souls, hoping that God may in due time dispose them to profess religion, and become full members, entitled to all the privileges of God's people.

IV. *Females*. In this class some are in full communion, and some are not; also, some are seniors and some are juniors in age. They are however to be respected according to their standing in the church, as beloved mothers or sisters, and treated with due tenderness and be-

nevolence. 1 Tim. v. 12. But females are not permitted to share in the government of the church, neither are they permitted to preach, exhort or pray, as leaders in the public worship of God. The apostle Paul determined that *men*, and not *women*, should perform prayer *on all occasions* in public worship; and that women should be in subjection. Neither did he suffer them to teach, speak, or usurp authority, but commanded them to be silent in the church; and he counted it a shame for a woman to speak, and dangerous for them to lead in public worship. 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35. 1 Tim. ii. 8—15.

V. *Children.* This class of members is a very important branch of the church of Christ. God always took the little children of believers into his covenant, and acknowledged them to be members of his church, or visible kingdom on earth. Gen. vi. 18, and ix. 9, and xvii. 7—14, 23—27, and xxi. 4. Ezek. xvi. 20, 21. Matt xix. 14. Acts ii. 39.

We obtain an interest in the covenant of grace, and are constituted real members of the church by faith in Christ. God has ordained that the children of believers should be interested in the covenant through the faith of the parent, and hence it is that believers' children are counted members of the church, and have a right to baptism. 1 Cor. vii. 14. Acts ii. 38, 39.

On this principle it was that Peter, on the day of pentecost, when the first Christian church was formed, declared to the three thousand who were enquiring what they should do, that on condition they would *repent*, that is, *believe*, they should be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Their repentance (which is the same as faith,) gave them a right to church-membership, which was signified by baptism; because faith in Christ interested them in the covenant of grace, on which the church is founded. He also declared, that, on this condition, the *promise* of the covenant was both to them and their children, as it was in the case of Abraham and his seed, and gave both them and their children a right to membership in the church, and of course a right to baptism, which was the token of that membership, as Abraham's faith gave him and his house a right to circumcision; the covenant including even his young son Isaac at eight days old. Acts ii. 37—39. He also declared that this privilege

was not confined to Jewish believers, but that all the Gentiles, who were afar off, whomsoever God would effectually call, should enjoy the same, both themselves and their children.

On this plan, the blessing of Abraham was promised to come upon the Gentiles by families. Gen. xii. 3. Jer. xxxi. 1. On this plan, Christ commanded his disciples, when he sent them out to preach, to proclaim peace to every house or family, and said, that if the son of peace were there, their peace, that is, the blessings of the gospel should rest upon that house; but if not, their peace should return to them again. Matt. x. 12, 13. Luke x. 5, 6.

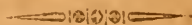
On this plan, God claimed the little children of Israel as his own. Ezek. xvi. 20, 21. On this plan, St. John said, the nobleman and his whole house believed; John iv. 53. and Christ said that salvation was come to the house of Zacchæus, because he was a son of Abraham, to wit, *a believer*. Luke xix. 9. On this plan, the apostle Paul said, the children even of one believing parent were holy. 1 Cor. vii. 14. On this plan, he baptised Lydia and her household, Acts xvi. 15; and the jailor and his household, Acts xvi. 33; and the jailor rejoiced over his household, he believing in God. Acts xvi. 34. *Greek*. On this plan, Paul also baptised the household of Stephanas. 1 Cor. i. 16. Lastly, On this plan, Christ suffered little children, to wit, little circumcised children, to come to him, and pronounced that they belonged to the kingdom of heaven, to wit, *his church*. Matt. xix. 14.

Thus it is evident that the faith of the parent or parents, is, according to the plan of the covenant of grace, placed to the account of the children, as well as to the parent him or herself, and gives the children a right to membership in the church, and consequently to baptism, so that every believer's child is born a member of the church and has a right to be acknowledged by baptism; and therefore they are a very important part of the church of Christ.

VI. *Africans, or people of color*. We believe and are satisfied that a number of black people are truly religious. Those who are baptised are acknowledged to be members of the church. As fellow Christians, they are to be respected and treated as brethren in the Lord. Some of

them can read the scriptures, and are well informed in the doctrines of the Christian religion, and are both sensible and judicious, and although their circumstances as slaves, or as a people of color, are, in a civil sense and in the common estimation of the people, degrading and very unfavorable, yet we are to consider that Christ, to whom we all belong, is no respecter of persons, and that he will feel an injury done to them as quick as if they were white; and therefore they are to be treated as members of the same body with us, with Christian charity and benevolence.

But God, in his wise providence, has placed mankind in different spheres of life, and some are subordinate to, and dependent on others: and he, in his word, has directed all to fulfil their respective duties according to the sphere in which they are placed. Inasmuch, therefore, as our black people occupy a humble station among us, according to the scale of divine providence, it appears most prudent and most conducive to the welfare and respectability of the church, at least in present circumstances, that they be placed in the class of juniors in the church: and that they be not permitted to have any share in governing the church as presbyters, nor admitted as competent witnesses for or against any, except those of their own color. They are therefore to remember the apostle's directions in 1 Cor. vii. 20—24, "Let everyman abide in the calling wherein he is called. Art thou called, being a servant? care not for it. And let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God."



CHAPTER III.

OF THE PRESBYTERY OF THE CHURCH.

I. The presbytery of the church, or congregation, shall be composed of the male communicants who are twenty-one years old, or upwards, belonging to the society and of none others. No person shall act judicially in any indicatory but in that to which he belongs, as that would

be, in its degree, a subjection to foreign authority. However, members of other churches may be permitted to sit as corresponding friends, and consult, argue and give what light and assistance they can; but they may not vote in the decision of any case whatever. 1 Tim. ii. 8—15. Matt. xxiii. 8—11.

II. The presbytery shall choose a moderator and clerk, who shall continue for one year in their respective offices; and until others are chosen, and the same persons may be always eligible during good behaviour.

The moderator shall keep good order, and shall decide in points of order, although his decision shall be subject to an appeal to the house. It shall be the province of the moderator to propose business to the house, and to determine the order in which business shall be conducted, to put the question, and to give the casting vote. The moderator shall not argue a case but by the permission of the house; he must leave the chair, and by the consent of the house, some other member must take it; before he shall speak on any case. He must make all necessary proclamations, administer censures, and he, or the clerk, shall issue citations, and in all cases he shall act as the executive officer of the presbytery.

The clerk shall keep a regular and accurate record of all the material transactions of the judicatory; which record shall be subject to the inspection of the house. The signature of the moderator, or the clerk, or both, shall be deemed authentic, and both the moderator and clerk shall affix their signatures to the transactions of every session of presbytery, and to all certificates, dismissions, commissions and reports in which the presbytery is concerned. It shall also be the business of the clerk to take down minutes of the meetings, adjournments, and of all the material transactions of the presbytery, and enter them on his record, and also to furnish the presbytery and himself with proper and sufficient stationary for this business; for which he shall be entitled to a demand on the presbytery, at least for all disbursements for this purpose.

III. The presbytery shall have authority to administer all necessary oaths to witnesses in ecclesiastical trials which may come before them; which oaths shall be administered by the moderator or clerk. And when the

presbytery shall appoint any committee, either of enquiry, or any other special business which may require testimony, such committee shall also have authority to administer such oaths as may be necessary in fulfilling such special appointments. 2 Cor. xiii. 1. Heb. vi. 16.

IV. Any person, whether a member of the presbytery then in session, or of any other presbytery, may, by the request or permission of the house, occupy the chair and officiate in all things merely *ministerial*. But he shall not vote, nor add his signature to any official act, nor act in any manner judicially, and while he occupies the chair, the official moderator shall take his seat in the house and act as a common member until he resumes the chair.

V. Although two or three, met together in the name of Jesus, whether seaiors or juniors, male or female, may form a religious society, which will be blessed with the presence of Christ, and may be called a church; yet no church can be organized and vested with full ecclesiastical powers unless she has at least three male members in full communion, twenty-one years old or upward: because it would be contrary to the general dictates both of scripture and reason, for a presbytery to be constituted of fewer than three presbyters. 1 Cor. xiv. 40. Therefore, the quorum of a presbytery shall not be less than three; and any three members of a presbytery whose number is less than nine, shall be a quorum. If the presbytery consist of nine members or upward, the quorum shall be one third of the number.

VI. The presbytery shall have both original and final jurisdiction in all cases whatever; and from their judgment there shall be no appeal. However the presbytery shall have power to try a case, *de novo*, on the probable presumption of *new light*. They may also reconsider the case, and rescind their judgment; provided two-thirds of the members agree to it, and a majority of the members be present, who first gave judgment on the case which is proposed to be reconsidered.

VII. When the presbytery meet to do any business of importance, such as to try any litigated case; to examine candidates; to license or ordain any one to the ministry, &c. it will be proper for them to constitute and dissolve or adjourn their meetings by prayer. The moderator,

with the consent of any three members, shall have power to call a meeting of the presbytery; and when any three members request him to call a meeting, he shall do it. When the presbytery stands adjourned to any particular time or place, the members must meet accordingly. But when a meeting is called, it must be publicly done, so that the members may have an opportunity of knowing the appointment; and it shall be the duty of every member to attend punctually on all occasions, unless there are good reasons for their absence.

VIII. If any congregation think proper to have a session, or a commission of presbytery, to transact their business, they may conduct the government of their church on such a plan, according to the rules they may see fit to make and adopt: provided those rules be not repugnant to the general laws of the Independent Presbyterian Church. Yet we do conceive that it is more consistent with the apostolic form, in which the primitive churches were governed, for the presbytery to conduct the business of the church without a session. And in that case, we advise that the presbytery nominate some of their senior and respectable members to assist in the distribution of the element, on communion occasions; and to attend to such services of this kind as may be necessary, that every thing may be conducted decently and without distraction or disorder.

IX. The presbytery shall have discretionary power to sit and act as a *court of equity*, when they judge it expedient, and when the contending parties are agreed to such a mode of accommodation; thus they may settle many disputes in the congregation, without being tied down to the strict rules of a formal process. This may happily prevent many tedious and illnatured prosecutions, and settle matters more amicably and more to the honor of religion and the edification of the church, than to be driven to the necessity of entering into a formal trial on the strict principles of law. It is well known that a legal decision, let it be ever so just, scarcely ever reconciles the contending parties; one or the other is sure to be dissatisfied, not only with his opponent, but also with the judicatory, which is often a very unhappy circumstance. Therefore the presbytery would do well to discourage litigation as much as possible, and endeavour to

reconcile differences in a friendly way, or bring the guilty to a voluntary acknowledgement. 1 Cor. vi. 7, 8.

X. Any of the presbyters of the church may assist in serving the table, as to distributing the elements and such like, or they may invite any of the presbyters of any other church to assist them. What is commonly called *serving the tables* is merely a ministerial thing, and every presbyter, or elder, in the church may decently and properly perform this service at the table of the Lord. 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

CHAPTER IV.

FORM OF PROCESS.

I. All prosecutions or endictments shall be reduced to writing, and no process shall be instituted on a verbal charge. The crime must be particularly specified, and the time and place when and where it was committed, as near as possible. The charge must be dated and signed by the prosecutor, and the names of the witnesses, to establish the allegation, must also be added.

II. No accusation shall be admitted, unless there be grounds to believe that the charge can probably be supported; and unless the matter of the charge be of such importance as to require the notice of the church. The judicatories shall be careful to discountenance, and as much as possible to suppress; all frivolous and malicious prosecutions; they are to study the edification and honor of the church of Christ, and not the gratification of malicious prosecutors. Acts xxiii. 29, and xviii. 14—17, and xix. 36—40. 2 Tim. ii. 14. 1 Tim. v. 19.

III. After a charge is admitted, if the parties are ready and willing to go into trial, the judicatory may immediately proceed to the investigation of the case; but if either of the parties are unwilling, or not ready, it shall be put off at least till the tenth day after the charge has been entered; and all necessary citations for witnesses, &c. shall be issued by the moderator or clerk, in due

time before the next meeting. If the plaintiff, or defendant, or any of the witnesses be present, the moderator may cite them from the chair, but this verbal citation must be noted in the minutes; and the defendant shall be furnished with a copy of the charge.

IV. When the trial comes on, the moderator or clerk shall first read the charge to the defendant, and shall put the question to him, "*Guilty, or not guilty?*" If he acknowledge guilt, the trial of course is ended, and the judicatory shall pass sentence according to the nature of the crime. But if he shall say, "*not guilty,*" or if he does not acknowledge guilt, they must proceed to the investigation of the case. When a defendant says, *he is not guilty*, it is not to be understood that he affirms his innocence, but only that he refuses to acknowledge his guilt, and that he puts his cause to issue; it is a law phrase, and if he should be convicted, or even on conviction acknowledge his guilt, yet he shall not be charged with falsehood, because he *legally* tells the *truth*, for no man is *legally* guilty, until he is *legally* convicted, and his denial of guilt is only a legal demand for a trial. John xviii. 19—23. Acts xxv. 8—11.

V. The prosecutor, or the Moderator for him, may state, or explain the case to the court, if it needs explanation; then the witnesses shall be sworn. The oath administered to the witnesses shall be to the following effect, viz: "Do you solemnly swear, and appeal to God, that the evidence which you shall give to the Presbytery, on the case now before them, shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God." In the examination of the witnesses any member of the judicatory, and the prosecutor and defendant shall have a right to put what questions to the witnesses they think proper, provided that no question be put, nor any thing allowed to be stated by the witnesses, but what is relative to the case in hands; and no *hear-say* evidence shall be admitted.

VI. After the evidence has been heard, the parties may plead their cause, the prosecutor first, and the defendant next; and each shall be allowed a reply. After the pleadings are over, and the judicators shall be alone, to argue the case among themselves, and to make up their judgment.

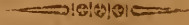
VII. The decision, or judgment of the judicatory must always be founded on what is emphatically called, *law and evidence*. No member shall give his opinion, as a judge, from any knowledge that he has of the case, as a private man. This knowledge as a man, let it be ever so correct, and even founded on what he, in a private capacity, has actually seen and heard, shall not sway his judgment. Because this would be contrary to the principles of law and equity. If any member of the judicatory knows any thing relevant to the case, he may come forward and be sworn, and bear testimony of what he knows upon oath, in open court. This would give an opportunity for cross examination, and for pleading on his evidence; and no judgment founded on private knowledge can be just, according to the rules which God has ordained in his church, for he hath decreed, (Heb. vi. 13. 16, compared with 2 Cor. xiii. 1, and Matt. xviii. 16;) that *an oath of confirmation* shall be the end of all strife, and that every word, or every thing, (*ᾠρα*.) shall be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses.

VIII. If the evidence brought forward on the case does not support the charge, the defendant shall be acquitted, and the accuser may be liable to censure. If it appears on the trial, that he has acted from pure and upright motives, and that he did not intend to wrong his brother, or slander his character, but that he was mistaken in the grounds of his accusation, or deceived as to the strength of the evidence which he expected to bring forward; in short, if it appears he was candid, honest, and well meaning in instituting the process, the judicatory must judge favourably of his conduct, and only give him a friendly caution to be more careful and tender of the feelings and reputation of his brethren for the future.

But if, on the investigation, it appears that the charge was frivolous, and too groundless, and especially if there appears a tincture of malice, ill will, or malevolence, in the affair, the prosecutor shall be censured as highly as the judicatory may think expedient, for rash and untender conduct, in bringing forward a slanderous accusation against a brother, which he was not able to support. 1 Pet. iii. 16. 1 Cor. viii. 12.

IX. If the charge be supported, and the defendant found guilty, he must be censured according to the na-

ture and aggravation of his crime, and must be held under censure until he confess his fault, and the judicatory be satisfied as to the sincerity of his repentance. 1 Cor. x. 11—13, and 1 Tim. v. 20.



CHAPTER V.

ECCLESIASTICAL RULES.

1. In all private or personal cases; where individual members are especially concerned, and the offence is not principally against the church, the steps must be taken which Christ has prescribed in Matt. xviii. 15—17, compared with chap. v. 23, 24. For instance, if A offend B, by opprobrious language, such as calling him "raca," (thou worthless, empty fellow,) or, "thou fool," (thou graceless, blinded, villain,) or by actions, or conduct, such as abusing, reproaching, overreaching, defrauding him, &c. These and such like offences being private, that is committed not against the public, but against a private individual, are to be privately settled if possible. B, who is offended, must therefore go to A, and try to convince him of his fault, and be reconciled to him.—But B, himself, must show a friendly disposition, and not be over rigorous with A. If he fail of obtaining his end, he must take with him one or two others, not only to assist in bringing about a reconciliation, but also to be witnesses in the case, as to what may take place on the occasion. And if they fail of effecting a friendly accommodation, he must then bring his complaint to the church in an orderly manner according to the rules of discipline.

On the other hand, A, when he brings his gift to the altar, that is, intends to sit in communion at the table of the Lord, which requires him to be in friendship with his brethren; if he knows that B, who is one of his brethren, has ought against him, that is, if he knows that he has injured B, and given him just reason to be offended with him, A must, himself, go to B, and confess his fault,

and be reconciled to him, before he offer his gift.—
Now, if both these persons would do their duty, according to Christ's directions, that is, if A, the offender, would go to B, who is justly offended, to be reconciled, and B, would go to A, who has offended him, to obtain a reconciliation; no doubt but a friendly accommodation would be effected; and whichsoever refuses to comply with this rule, and will not make friends, must be reported to the church, and be dealt with accordingly.

II. But the case is quite different with regard to crimes of a public nature, such as the worship of images, profaning the name of God, or the sabbath day, murder, intoxication or adultery, &c.; such crimes are equally offensive to the whole church, and no one member has any more to do with it than another. Therefore, our Saviour's rule is not intended to apply in such cases; but the apostles rule must be applied, 1 Tim. v. 20; "Them who sin," that is, them who sin against all, and not against a private individual, "rebuke," that is, "convict before all, that others also may fear." Compare Gal. ii. 14, and 1 Cor. v. 3—5, 12, 13, and 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14.

III. Every person is to be considered innocent until he is legally convicted; and no person shall be censured until he is found guilty, either by his own confession, or by a due course of law: John viii. 10, 11, and xviii. 23. Acts xxii. 25, and xvi. 37, and xxiv. 13, 19.

IV. In cases where guilt is pretty evident, and publicly known, or suspected, and the church has not had time or a convenient opportunity to try the case by a regular process, they may, on principles of prudence, advise or request a member to stay back from the Lord's table, until his case is determined by the judicatory; but he must not be censured until he has had a fair trial. Matt. v. 23, 24. Rom. xiv. 19. 1 Cor. vi. 12.

V. All trials by a course of law must be open, and public, and conducted on the fair and correct principles of discipline. 1 Tim. v. 20. Matt. xviii. 17.

VI. No criminal fact shall be established by a solitary witness.

This is a law founded on divine authority, and ought to be conscientiously attended to in criminal cases, not only by judicatories, on public trials, but also by neighborhoods, relative to idle tales, and scandalous stories..

When a man of good standing, and of unquestionable veracity, gives in his testimony upon oath, it seems as if he ought to be believed; and even when he tells a bad story on his neighbor, we are apt to give him credit: and so we take up an ill report, on the credit of a single witness, contrary to the express command of God; and thus there is much harm done in the church.

God knows the deceit, and the hidden evils of the human heart, and is aware "that all men are *liars*." Ps. cxvi. 11. Rom. iii. 4. Ps. lxii. 9. And he knew how hazardous it would be to trust the decisions of his church to the credit of a single witness, and therefore he has expressly prohibited it. In the Jewish church he enjoined that "one witness shall not rise up against a man, for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." Deut. xix. 15. compared with chap. xvii. 6, and Num. xxxv. 30. 1 Kings xxi. 9—14, and Matt. xxvi. 59—61. Mark xiv. 56. This law was also established in the Christian church, by Christ and his apostles. The law, as it is stated in the New Testament, is, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every thing be established."—(Greek.) Matt. xviii. 16. 2 Cor. xiii. 1, compared with 1 Tim. 5. 19, and John viii. 17, 18, and chap. v. 31, 32. Heb. x. 28. Rev. xi. 3.

There are some crimes of a more hidden nature than others, and are usually committed in a secret manner: yet God has made no exceptions, and requires two witnesses in the case of *any sin that is sinned*. Yet it appears necessary in cases where two witnesses can hardly be expected, that circumstances accompanying the case itself, if they infer a strong presumption, and do go to strengthen the testimony of one positive witness, of good credit, that such a circumstance, or circumstances may be admitted as a second witness. 1 Kings xxi. 16—28.

VII. Doubtful cases ought always to be determined on the charitable side, "for many rejoiceth against judgment." James ii. 13.

VIII. When a church is apprised, by common report, of any scandal alledged against any of her members, and if, upon prudent enquiry, they find good grounds to suspect that the report can be established, by sufficient tes-

tion, the judicatory may institute a charge against the supposed offender, in the name of the church and prosecute it according to order. 1 Cor. vi. 7.

IX. No charge shall be admitted for any crime supposed to be committed twelve months before said charge is exhibited; because it argues too great a degree of spite and ambition, to call up crimes to public view, after being suffered to lie so long concealed; and plainly shows that such prosecutors are influenced more by a disposition to gratify an evil temper, than to reclaim the offender, or promote the purity of the church, and the honor of religion. Matt. xviii. 15—17.

X. No person shall be convicted, or censured, *ipso facto*, but every one shall be entitled to a fair open trial according to law, by a regular process, before he is condemned; except for indecent or contumacious behaviour toward the judicatory when sitting, or for refusing to obey the citations of the church; for no person can have a fair trial if he will not attend. John xviii. 23. Acts xxiii. 23.

XI. If any person sit one citation, he shall be cited again. If he obey the second citation, and give good reasons for his absence, he shall be acquitted of contumacy, but if the judicatory do not sustain his reasons, he shall be rebuked for his disobedience to the authority of the church. If he sit the second citation, he shall be cited a third time; but if he sit the third citation without sending up his reasons, he shall, *ipso facto*, be suspended from the communion and cited a fourth time. And if he still refuse to obey without sending up good reasons for non-appearance, the judicatory shall pronounce the sentence of excommunication upon him, for his contumacious disrespect to the authority of the church of Christ; which sentence must be publicly executed by the authority of the presbytery in the face of the congregation, except repentance prevent. For no one shall be acknowledged a member of the church, who will not submit to her government. Heb. xiii. 17.

XII. The censures which the judicatories of the church shall inflict upon offending members, shall consist of admonitions, rebuke, suspension from the Lord's table, and excommunication from church membership. And these, or either of them, shall be inflicted according as the na-

ture, or aggravations of the crime, or crimes may be.—
2 Tim. iv. 2. Titus i. 13, and ii. 15. 1 Cor. v. 4, 5.

XIII. Excommunication is the highest degree of church censure. This high censure must never be inflicted, but in case of obstinate *heresy*, which is apostacy from the faith; or in case of obstinate contumacy, which is contempt of authority, or in case of habitual rebellion against the moral laws of God without repentance. Titus iii. 10. 11. 1 Cor. v. 4, 5. Matt. xix. 17. 1 Tim. i. 20.

XIV. The sentence of excommunication shall be executed in the following manner :

On a day of public worship, or at least when the church is assembled together, the moderator of the presbytery, or some one officiating in his place, shall publicly pronounce the following words, or to the same effect :

“A. B. in the issue of a regular course of trials, has been convicted, of (here mention the crime,) and as he still remains incorrigible notwithstanding all our attempts to bring him to repentance, the sentence of excommunication is pronounced upon him, and is now to be inflicted. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the presence of this church now assembled together, we do excommunicate the same A. B. and exclude him from the society of the *Faithful*, and deliver him up to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, and that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus; and may God bless the discipline of the church to him, and to us all. Amen.” 1 Cor. v. 4, 5, 13. Matt. xviii. 17, 18. 1 Tim. i. 19, 20.

XV. If an excommunicated person become penitent, his acknowledgment must be received publicly in the congregation, and he must be restored to the fellowship of the church. 2 Cor. ii. 6—8.

XVI. No member who is under censure, lower than that of excommunication, shall be required to stand before the congregation, and give public satisfaction.—That custom is too severe and inhuman, and savors too much of popish penance, and is contrary to the mild dictates of the gospel. It shall be sufficient for the penitent to confess his fault before the judicatory where he has been convicted. However, the judicatory may, in some cases, judge it prudent to publish their judgment, and the criminals confession, to the congregation, when

it will be to the respectability of the church, and the honour of religion. But care must be taken not to publish the faults of Christians unnecessarily, as it may tend to dishonor religion, harden the wicked, and to grieve the people of God. Luke xvii. 3, 4, compared with Matt. xviii. 21, 22.

XVII. Any person under censure shall be forgiven and restored, whenever the judicatory are satisfied as to the sincerity of his repentance. Luke xvii. 3, 4. Matt. xviii. 21, 22.

XVIII. A believer's child, derives its right to baptism through the faith of its parent; and as the right of the child is not through the parent's holiness, but through his faith, the occasional imperfections of the parent cannot affect the right of the child; while the parent's faith stands good, the right of the child must stand good also. Therefore, when the parent is under censure for his occasional faults, that censure is not to be extended so far as to affect the right of the child. When the crime of a parent is so great, that it merits a higher degree of chastisement than an admonition or a rebuke, we apply suspension from communion as a higher degree of correction; but this suspension, as it applies to the parent, only affects his right to the Lord's table. (Matt. v. 23, 24.) But if we apply the suspension to the baptism of the child, the force of the censure falls upon the innocent infant, which has to lose its right, through the parent's fault. This would be cruel and unjust, because the fault of the parent does not affect the right of the child.—Therefore while ever the parent is acknowledged to be a believer, let him be ever so imperfect, and liable to correction, his child's right to baptism must be good, through his faith, and it must not be deprived of its just claim, even if its parent, through his imperfections, should become liable to the censure of the church. Acts xvi. 31, 33. 1 Cor. vii. 14. Acts ii. 39.

XIX. It is recommended to churches who have *vacant sabbaths*, especially those who have members qualified to lead in social worship, to meet together on those vacant days at their respective meeting-houses, or at any other place they may think convenient, and engage in religious exercises; such as singing hymns, praying, reading, or exhortation. God has owned and granted his blessing to

religious societies; and his blessing is not confined to the labors of ministers; but he has promised that where even a few are met together in his name, he will grant them his spiritual presence. This is indeed great encouragement. Pious, honest farmers, mechanics, and day-labourers ought to consider that our prayers are heard, not for our much or fine speaking, but for Christ's sake. An honest prayer put up in the name of Christ, in the plain simple language of a sincere heart, is more acceptable to God, and more edifying to the church, than the dress of eloquence, and flow of language, where the heart is wanting, Matt. vi. 7, 8. Probably the apostolic churches had no silent sabbaths. It is a sign of too great luke-warmness for churches to spend the sabbath at home, when they might assemble together, and unite in the profitable and delightful work of public prayer and praise. God loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Ps. lxxxvii. 2 Heb. x. 24, 25.

XX. It is also recommended to the churches, to take notice of such of their members as possess good talents, piety, and *aptness to teach*, who appear to be qualified to lead in social worship; and that they encourage them, on proper occasions, to engage in the business of public prayer and exhortation. And those who are thus qualified, should be conscientious and cheerful in serving the church on all proper occasions, when the church needs their assistance. The apostolic churches had teachers, and exhorters among them, as well as ministers and pastors. Rom. xii. 6—8. Heb. x. 24, 25. Acts xiii. 15.

XXI. It is likewise highly recommended that all the members of the church, with their families, their children and servants, duly attend the public worship of God, when they have preaching either statedly or occasionally. It is the apostles command to the church. (Heb. x. 24, 25.) "Let us—not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." It is to be suspected, that those who forsake the assemblies of the saints and neglect the house of God, are destitute of a genuine taste for religion. It is pitiable to hear the trifling excuses which too many make for not attending the preaching of the word. The gospel was dearly bought, and is freely offered, and it requires hard labor to preach it faithfully; but it is the language clearly expressed by

the conduct of those who habitually desert the house of God, that the gospel is not worth the price that Christ gave for it, and not worth the labor of preaching it, and that the benefits of it are not worth receiving. It is readily granted that many attend duly at the house of God who are destitute of true religion; but that a pious, good man will habitually desert the temple of the Lord, is not so easily admitted. See Ps. xxvii. 4, and lxxxiv. 1—10, and cxii. 1—9.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMPETENCY OF JUDGES AND WITNESSES.

I. Every member of the presbytery shall be a competent judge, except such as are interested, or have prejudged the case. Also any person who is disinterested, or has not prejudged the case, and has not shown spite, nor uttered threats, &c. shall be a competent witness, except as follows:

II. A husband cannot be a competent judge, nor witness in the case of his wife; nor can a wife be a witness either for or against her husband.

III. A father cannot be a judge in the case of his child; nor a son in the case of his parents.

IV. Insane persons are not competent.

V. Young children are incompetent to be witnesses until they are capable of understanding the nature of an oath, and are of such maturity and strength of mind as to entitle them to credit.

VI. If either of the parties in a case on trial suspect a witness to be partial, or interested, he may have him sworn to the following effect: "Do you solemnly swear, that you will well and truly answer the questions which will be put to you, relative to your competency as a witness in the present case, to the best of your knowledge. So help you God." When the witness has answered the

questions put to him, the judicatory shall judge as to his competency.

VII. A person's acknowledgement before the judicatory shall be sufficient evidence against him; provided it be free, and not extorted by threats, or not drawn out of him by allurements or persuasion. Luke xix. 22—24. But no person shall be required to criminate himself, John xviii. 20, 21; nor shall any one be permitted to purge himself from guilt by his own oath, as that would be too great a temptation and would give too great an occasion for false swearing, and such an oath would be too liable to suspicion to be believed in a court of justice.

CHAPTER VII.

PROCESS AGAINST A MINISTER. ALSO A BRIEF VIEW OF SOME NON-ËSSENTIAL DOCTRINES.

I. Nothing is of greater importance to the church than TRUTH, John xviii. 37, and viii. 32; and nothing has done more injury than ERROR. 2 Tim. ii. 16—18, and iii. 5—8, and 1 Tim. vi. 20, 21. *Truth* is the *panoply* of the church; *error* is the *strong hold* of Satan. The church with an *orthodox ministry* is the pillar and ground of the truth, 1 Tim. iii. 25; *false teachers* are the engines of Satan's kingdom, by which he assails and endeavours to destroy *the kingdom of Christ*. Gal. i. 6, 7. Matt. vii. 15. 2 Pet. ii. 1—3. 1 Tim. iv. 1—3. Therefore, every pastor is to watch over his congregation, and feed his flock with the true bread which came down from heaven, and his life and conversation must be according to Godliness. 2 Pet. v. 1—4. And the presbytery of the congregation shall also watch over the pastor of the church, both as to his doctrine and his moral conduct. 1 John iv. 1—6. 2 John x. 11.

II. If a minister preach *heretical doctrines*, that is, doctrines which strike at the vitals of religion, and contradict the radical doctrines of the gospel, and those points

which are essentially connected with them, as is stated in Chapter III, the presbytery to which he belongs shall enter a charge against him for preaching, holding forth, or propagating *heresy*. Titus iii. 10, 11.

III. In this charge the particular doctrine or doctrines, deemed *heretical*, shall be stated, and the time and place when and where preached or propagated, or held forth, either publicly or in conversation; which charge shall be signed by the prosecutor, or entered in the name of the church; with the date and witnesses to support it. And the process shall be conducted according to the common form, as directed in Chapter IV.

IV. In a process against a minister for *heresy*, two things are to be supported. First, It must be established either by the defendant's acknowledgement, or by two or three competent witnesses, that the defendant has preached or held forth in substance the doctrine or doctrines stated in the charge. If this be not acknowledged nor proved, the prosecution fails of course, and the defendant shall be acquitted. But if this be established, then, Secondly, The doctrine or doctrines must be proved to be *heresy*. On the trial of this point, the *word of God* must be relied on as the only rule or standard by which to determine whether the doctrine be true or false, or whether it be *heresy* or *not*. Isa. viii. 20. If it appears from the analogy of the scriptures, that the doctrines stated in the charge strike at the vitals of religion, or contradict the radical doctrines of the gospel, they shall be deemed *heresy*, and the defendant shall be found guilty; otherwise he shall be acquitted. Gal. i. 8, 9.

V. When a minister is found guilty of *heresy*, he shall be immediately suspended from the exercise of his office and from the Lord's table, except an immediate recantation of his errors, and a sincere avowal of the truth, prevent. Titus iii. 10.

VI. When a minister is suspended, the presbytery shall treat him tenderly, and hold frequent conferences with him as a brother, either by appointing judicious, prudent sensible men to converse with him, or by any other plan they may think most expedient, in order, if possible, to convince him of his error, and bring him back to the acknowledgement of the truth, and to the abandonment of his heretical sentiments. And if he become sensible of

his error, confess his fault to the presbytery, and pledge his promise to adhere firmly to the true doctrines of the gospel; the presbytery shall restore him to the exercise of his office, and to the communion of the church. 2 Thes. iii. 14, 15. Luke xvii. 3, 4. 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

VII. But if he prove obstinate and incorrigible, and there appear no hopes of his being reclaimed, he shall be deposed from his office, and his congregation declared vacant. Gal. v. 12. Nevertheless if he afterwards return and repent, and the presbytery be satisfied as to his reformation, they shall restore him to the communion of the church, and if they judge it prudent and safe they may also restore him to his office. But they shall be at liberty either to retain him as their pastor or dismiss him.

VIII. There are some particular doctrines which we hold to be not only true, but also of great importance; although to believe them or not, we do not consider essential to salvation. These doctrines ought ever to be strictly maintained and defended both by the laity and clergy of the Independent Presbyterian Church, as well as all others, although they ought not to be made terms of communion. 2 Tim. i. 13. Jude iii. The following doctrines we believe to be scriptural and true:

1. Original guilt, imputed to all the human race in consequence of the fall of Adam, who represented all his posterity. Ps. li. 5. 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22. Rom. v. 12—21.

2. The doctrine of particular election to salvation, according to God's own sovereign will, and unchangeable purpose from eternity. Rom. viii. 28—30, 33. John vi. 37, 39. 1 Thess. i. 4. Eph. i. 4, 5. 2 Tim. i. 9. 1 Pet. i. 2. Acts xiii. 48.

3. The decrees of God, by which all things are fore-ordained according to his infinitely wise counsel and for his own glory. Acts iv. 28, and xv. 18. Matt. x. 29, 30. Ps. cxlv. 10.

4. The final perseverance of the saints, which is ensured to all believers by the unchangeable promises of the covenant of grace, which is well ordered in all things and sure. John vi. 39, 40, and iii. 16, and v. 24, and x. 27—29, and xi. 25, 26, and xiv. 19. Rom. viii. 30—39. 1 Pet. i. 3—5. Heb. xiii. 5.

5. The right of infants to church membership, and

consequently to baptism through the faith of their parents, according to the scripture plan of the covenant of grace. Matt. xix. 14. Acts ii. 39, and xvi. 14, 31, 33. 1 Cor. i. 16, and vii. 14.

6. The only state of probation is in this world, and the overtures of the gospel ceases with every one at the time of his death; and at the last day Christ will give up his mediatorial kingdom. Therefore,

7. The punishment of the wicked will be eternal, as well as the happiness of the righteous. 2 Cor. vi. 2. John iii. 36. Matthew xxv. 41, 46. 1 Cor. xv. 24—28. Rev. xxii. 11.

These we consider true and very important doctrines; and they ought ever to be believed and supported. And if our church will ever relinquish these principles, they may reflect and consider, and the world may know that they will have swerved from the doctrines which were firmly held and maintained by those who first formed the Independent Presbyterian Church.

IX. If any minister hold and preach doctrines contrary to the above principles, the presbytery to which he belongs ought to discountenance him, and oppose him in a firm but decent manner; and although they are not to consider him as liable to the censure of the church for *heresy*, yet they have it in their power, if he persist in his errors, to dismiss him on the account of his erroneous principles from his pastoral care over them, and thus to let the clergy and the world know, that they will not receive for *doctrinee* the *commandments of men*.

X. As for a process against a minister for immoral conduct, it must be prosecuted in the same manner as a similar charge against any lay member.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE GENERAL CONVENTION.

I. There shall be a convention composed of delegates from the several churches belonging to our body, which shall meet annually as representatives of the church at large, as an organ or channel of communication for the benefit of the whole, and to promote the general cause of religion.

II. This representative body shall be called, THE GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE INDEPENDENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

III. The General Convention shall meet annually on the first Friday in August, at whatever place they may adjourn to from year to year.

IV. Seven members present at the time and place appointed, shall constitute a quorum competent to do business.

V. The general convention shall be composed of the ordained preachers, and commissioners or delegates from all the churches belonging to the independent body. All ordained ministers of the gospel in regular standing shall be entitled, *ex officio*, to a seat in the convention, as representatives of the church at large; and every individual organized society, whether large or small, shall be entitled to two delegates annually, so that the representation of all the churches and the weight of suffrage may be equal.

VI. Every delegate shall produce a written commission from the presbytery to which he belongs, signed by the moderator and clerk, and dated not more than three months before the meeting of the convention; and no person shall be a delegate unless he be a presbyter in good standing in the church.

VII. The commission shall be in the following form, viz: "This is to certify, that Mr. — is commissioned to sit and act as a member of the General Convention, to meet at — on the first Friday of August, A. D. —, and to represent — church. Given by order this — day of — A. D. —.

A. B. Moderator;
C. D. Clerk."

VIII. The general convention shall not possess any degree of coercive power or juridical authority over the church, or any branch thereof; nor shall they give advice or counsel on any question whatever, relative to any case in the government of any individual church or any individual member or members of it. A church, in the bounds of which a case has originated, and who are acquainted with all the circumstances attending it, must necessarily be more competent judges than any assembly who are strangers to the case can possibly be, let them be ever so wise. Therefore the convention shall neither be advised, nor give advice in any matter of fact which may be litigated in any church whatever.

IX. A very special design, or object, in constituting a general convention, is, that it may operate as a *cement* or bond of union to bind our churches together by a social and friendly intercourse, and that there may subsist a common interest throughout the whole body, and to act as a simple *organ* of the churches, to keep among them the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

X. The general convention shall keep a register, in which the names of all the ordained ministers shall be accurately recorded, and also the names of all the individual churches belonging to our body.

The general convention, on their annual meetings, shall, if possible, be opened with a sermon, and shall always constitute and adjourn by prayer. After they have been constituted they shall, before they proceed to other business, elect a moderator to keep order and to direct in the business that may come before the house; and also a clerk to read papers and communications which may be laid before them, and to take a minute of their proceedings. The moderator and clerk shall continue in office one year, and until others are chosen.

XI. The convention shall also elect a stated Secretary, to continue in office during pleasure, and good conduct; whose business shall be to keep an accurate record of all the proceedings of the convention, in a portable book procured and kept for that purpose. He shall have the charge of all the papers belonging to the convention; and shall bring or send the book of records to every annual meeting, that the house may have prompt access to any part of their register whenever it may be necessary.

The record of the minutes of the last session, shall always be read before the house, immediately after the Moderator and Clerk are chosen ; so that unfinished business may be called up to view, and also that the minutes of the last *sedesunt* may be revised and receive the strictures of the house ; after which the record shall be signed by the Moderator.

XII. The stated Secretary when present at any meeting of the convention, may (if he choose,) officiate as clerk ; which may save some time and trouble. But when another person is chosen clerk, he must be careful to send, or hand up the minutes in good order, and in due time, to the Secretary, that he may register them in his book.

XIII. The convention at every annual meeting shall call upon the pastors or delegates of the respective churches to report, either verbally, or in writing, the state of religion in their congregations ; what apparent success the gospel has, especially among young people ; whether the people give a general and decent attendance on the public worship of God ; how many adults have been baptised, and how many admitted for the first time, to the Lord's table, &c.

XIV. If any of the churches have candidates under their care ; or have licensed any to preach the gospel ; or have ordained any to the ministry, they shall report the same to the general convention in writing, stating their names, and the time when any are licensed, or ordained ; which report shall be carefully recorded in the Secretary's book.

XV. The general convention shall have the sole management of missionary business ; and of forming any convention or correspondence with other denominations, and of conducting all matters of public interest, in which the church at large is concerned ; but no act of the connection shall stand good, which is contrary to the general voice of the churches.

XVI. The convention shall publish a pastoral letter at every annual meeting, composed of whatever may tend to cultivate piety in the heart, and holiness in the life and conversation, to convince and convert sinners, or to encourage and comfort the Godly ; and it will be proper to have a special regard to the particular circumstances in

which the church may be at the time, whether she be in prosperity or adversity, blessed with honor and peace, or wading through trouble and persecution ; enjoying a time of refreshing, or laboring under cold and lifeless formality.

XVII. The general convention shall make rules, or by laws for the regulation of their own conduct when sitting. They shall also have power to punish *ipso facto* by caution, reprimand, or rebuke from the chair, those members who transgress the laws of the house. And if any member of the convention, or any member of any of the churches, treat the convention, while sitting, with contempt, or contumacious disrespect, the moderator shall report him to the individual church to which he belongs, and they shall, on such report, consider the case, and shall deal with him according to the rules of discipline.

XVIII. As one of the grand objects of constituting the general convention, is to be a bond of union to the churches, and to cultivate a friendly intercourse between them. It is highly recommended that a communion be held annually on the sabbath after the Friday of their annual meeting. This will not only afford a sacramental occasion to the church where the convention may meet, but it will also give an opportunity to the several representatives of the churches to sit together at the Lord's table. It is also recommended, that they have public worship on Saturday and Monday, as well as on the Sabbath of the communion.

XIX. When any church think it expedient to alter, or amend any part of this constitution, and form of government, or to add any thing thereto. The amendment, alteration, or addition shall be drawn up in due form and sent, or carried up to the general convention. The convention receiving such draft, shall send an authentic duplicate of it to each of the individual churches belonging to the body, signed by the moderator and clerk.— And the churches shall consider the proposal sent to them, and shall send up their votes to the next meeting of the convention. If two thirds of the churches vote in favor of the alteration, amendment, or addition proposed, it shall pass into a law ; but if not, the question or proposition shall be lost.

FINIS.

